

Protecting Your Property from Earthquakes

Drawers and Cabinet Doors

Are You at Risk?

If you aren't sure whether your house is at risk from earthquakes, check with your local building official, city engineer, or planning and zoning administrator. They can tell you whether you are in an earthquake hazard area. Also, they usually can tell you how to protect yourself and your house and property from earthquakes.

What You Can Do

Earthquake protection can involve a variety of changes to your house and property -- changes that can vary in complexity and cost. You may be able to make some types of changes yourself. But complicated or large-scale changes and those that affect the structure of your house or its electrical wiring and plumbing should be carried out only by a professional contractor licensed to work in your state, county, or city. One example of earthquake protection is installing latches on cabinet doors and drawers so that they will remain closed during an earthquake. This is something that many homeowners can probably do on their own.

Install Latches on Drawers and Cabinet Doors

During an earthquake, drawers and cabinet doors can open and the stored materials can spill out and damage floors and floor coverings. Objects that fall from overhead cabinets can injure you or members of your family.

One way to prevent the accidental opening of drawers and cabinet doors is to install latches such as barrel bolts, safety hasps, and child-proof locks. Most hardware and home supply stores stock a variety of latches. The figure shows two types child-proof locks, one for drawers and one for cabinet doors. Most types of permanent latches can be installed easily and will not interfere with opening and closing of drawers and doors. The slide lock shown at right can be used on cabinets that do not need to be opened frequently; it is easily installed and removed.

Tips

Keep these points in mind when you install latches on drawers and cabinet doors:

- When possible, do not store heavy, breakable, or dangerous items (such as insecticides, solvents, and bleach) in overhead cabinets.
- Do not rely on magnetic or pinch-grip catches to hold cabinet doors closed, especially on overhead cabinets and any cabinets that contain heavy, breakable, or dangerous items.
- Install latches according to the manufacturer's directions. For example, use all of the hardware provided with the latch and do not substitute undersized screws or bolts for those provided.

Estimated Cost

The cost of adding latches will depend on the type you decide to buy and the number of drawers and cabinet doors you want to secure. Most latches will cost between \$2 and \$5. So, for example, if you do the work yourself, the cost of adding latches to all the cabinets and drawers in a medium-sized kitchen could range from about \$60 to about \$100. If you hire a contractor or handyman to install latches, you will have to pay for time as well as materials.

Other Sources of Information

Seismic Retrofit Training for Building Contractors and Building Inspectors: Participant Handbook, FEMA, 1995

Reducing the Risks of Nonstructural Earthquake Damage: A Practical Guide, FEMA-74, 1994

Protecting Your Home and Business from Nonstructural Earthquake Damage, FEMA, 1994

To obtain copies of these and other FEMA documents, call FEMA Publications at **1-800-480-2520**. Information is also available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.fema.gov>.

